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ABSTRACT

This speech reviews attitudes on higher education in relation to race, relevance, students, and alienation. A curriculum of engagement and commitment is recognized as a need in higher education. Recommendations suggest a cross-pollination of academic catalogues combining curriculum in each school or department and making it available to the student body. Additional emphasis is placed on the need to combine the abstract and the relevant in the classroom. (MJM)

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The Present-Minded Professor

by Fred W. Friendly

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Mr. Friendly is the Edward R. Murrow Professor of Broadcast Journalism at the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University, and Advisor on Broadcasting to the President of the Ford Foundation. The following address was delivered before the National Council of Teachers of English, at Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on November 28, 1968.

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TWO YEARS AGO Raymond (Gram) Swing, the first great commentator in American broadcast journalism, walked out of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism with me. He had, in his 80th year, lectured to one of my classes. As we looked for a taxi to take him to the airport, he said: "Twenty years ago if anyone had ever told me I would be walking down Morningside Heights with Professor Friendly, I'd have said he was insane."

If, forty years ago, my fourth-grade English teacher, Miss Forhan, had been told that her remedial reading pupil whose real name was Ferdinand, not Fred, would someday be addressing the National Council of Teachers of English, she would have gasped in disbelief.

If three years ago, when I was at CBS News, anyone had told me that I would dare to talk critically about higher education, I would have called it divine "chutzpa." The word, in case all of you haven't learned it from James Reston, means (according to the *Random House Dictionary* and the Yiddish thesaurus of slang) "unmitigated effrontery or impudence" though, like many finely-honed Yiddish words, it is deliciously untranslatable.

Because I believe that the newsroom and the classroom are drawing closer and closer together, I wish to speak of the mortar that is their common bond. I wish to speak in defense of that word—relevance—defamed by the Mark Rudds as a synonym for their undocumented protest and misunderstood by the Jacques Barzuns in their nostalgic defense of the virginity of the goddess of liberal arts. Relevance is simply the interconnection be-

tween history and/or literature and what one scholar calls "the significant pursuit of the confirmation of today's reality."

Most students don't take Mark Rudd seriously, nor do I. We do take Barzun seriously, and I suppose my test of his theories is something approaching an apprentice astronaut's challenging Einstein's theory of relativity. He may be all right and I may be all wrong, but because we all believe in the tradition of a university's being a forum for the thrust and collision of ideas, Dr. Barzun would probably encourage my arrogance.

He has written a new book, *The American University,* a volume full of the wisdom that has given him his high place in the American House of Intellect, and so provocative that I found myself reading it three times. Twice it was to study his theories about the American university and his fears of its imminent "bankruptcy, paralysis and futility." Dr. Barzun believes that a university professor should be sheltered from the turbulence of the real world, should, in effect, be an absent-minded professor with a pipe in his mouth, oblivious of the storms around him, that the university should not become a "public utility" or a "Red Cross station" serving everyone, or a "fire house on the corner answering all alarms —many of them false." My third reading of Barzun was to check out the flaw which I thought I had detected in the first two readings.

Dr. Barzun, who really believes in the irrelevance of relevance, writes:

> The belief that a curriculum can be devised and kept relevant to the present is an illusion: whose present in the first place and relevant for how long? . . . If a university is not to become an

educational weathervane, a sort of weekly journal published orally by aging Ph.D.'s, it must avoid all relevance of the obvious sort.

Dr. Barzun, who was Provost of Columbia during the decade leading up to the explosion at the university, blames the decline of student life on too much stimulation, too much extracurricular activity (such as student newspapers and radio stations), too much time devoted to the politics of protest. He fears the modern university attempts to fill too many gaps, like a medieval guild:

> . . . The only thing that the medieval guild used to provide and we do not, is masses for the dead, and if we don't do it, it is because we are not asked.

Race and Relevance

Now the flaw in all this reasoning, in these 300 pages which describe the American university through Barzun's model, Columbia, is that the author, by omission, gives himself away. For what distinguishes Columbia, aside from its excellent faculty and its involved student body, is its unique location. It is its liability, its challenge, and its laboratory—Harlem. Between Morningside Heights and Broadway the generation gap, the poverty gap, the race gap, all intersect. It was in the conflict over a gymnasium between Columbia and its neighbors that the explosions of last spring found their fuse. But nowhere in this scholarly work of Barzun's do the words Harlem, or black, or Negro appear. Yet race is as actively germane to Columbia, and to all universities in urban surroundings, as the atomic bomb is to world peace.

To scold a university that becomes involved

in such activities as a weathervane shifting in the winds of false excitement is to misread the seismic heaves that signal an earthquake. One hundred and fifty years ago, another intellectual, Thomas Jefferson, wrote of America's race problem and said: "I hear fire bells in the night."

Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, also hears alarm bells. "Under the guise of privilege and protection," she writes, "we have been penalizing our student population, separating them from the participation in the affairs of the real world and impairing their capacity to understand that world." Dr. Mead likes the word relevance. "The more we can realize that the events of Columbia are part of a large pattern of political unrest, ferment and hope in the world, the easier it will be to relate the re-creation of the university structure to the wider world. . . ."

Dr. Clark Kerr, the former President of the University of California, dreams of a series of urban-grant universities to do for the Harlems and Watts of the 20th century what the land-grant colleges did for the farms and factories of the 19th century.

The urban university's curriculum, he contends, should be concerned with the urban environment in its totality—its architecture, its space use, its cultural programs and recreational facilities, its health services.

One can stand with Clark Kerr and Margaret Mead without being against liberal arts any more than they are.

It may be cultural name-dropping for me to admit it, but I learned how to cover riots from Matthew Arnold in *Culture and Anarchy* as I learned about the responsibility

of the Fourth Estate from Burke and Carlyle, who created the phrase in the first place.

But, from Matthew Arnold, I also learned about Oxford's " 'Sweetness and Light:'. . . the Oxford of the past, has many faults; and she has heavily paid for them in defeat, in isolation, in want of hold upon the modern world."

The liberal arts are and will continue to be the prime pillar of our educational structure. But in 1968, that structure needs buttressing. It just doesn't work for students living on the edge of ghettos carved in asphalt and on a planet precipitously perched on the edge of thermonuclear extinction. To say that Chaucer and the *Battle of Thermopylae* and even Blake alone will prepare the class of 1972 for the problems of this besieged nation is not only to defy relevance, it is to forget history. "The pursuit and dignity of useful knowledge" (an inscription at M.I.T.) has long been an honored tradition in western civilization. In the 19th century it was because classics were not enough that the universities of London and Manchester and the London School of Economics were born. It was to answer this crucial need during the American industrial revolution that the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Carnegie Tech, Cooper Union, Cal Tech, and the Rhode Island School of Design, plus the significant land-grant colleges, the A&M schools, were founded. Alfred North Whitehead, whose whole life was a protest against "dead knowledge and inert ideas," cried out for the university to weld together imagination, intellect, and real world experience. "The antithesis between a technical and a liberal education

is fallacious," he wrote. "There can be no adequate technical education which is not liberal and no liberal education that is not technical . . . the intellect does not work best in a vacuum."

Students and Alienation

The most punitive thing about irrelevance is that it breeds alienation. Today's students are probably brighter and have more social consciousness than have any other students in American history. Whether we like it or not, many young people feel, in an ill-defined way, that their own parents have helped to sustain terrible inequities in this country. They see no realistic way to change or even to escape from a society that has, as one of my more moderate students has said, committed "cultural genocide" for a hundred years. They have to face the imminent possibility of support of a war few of them believe in. And they have to work in an educational system that does not address these problems. That's what prompts their impulse to "tear down the corrupt machine," as they put. Mix that with a youthful unwisdom—an inability to see or understand any of the values of the process—and you have total alienation. Many of them feel shortchanged by the quality of teaching, and their case against the graduate student teacher and preceptor is difficult to rebut.

This becomes even more intense in the case of the black undergraduate, who comes to the university in his freshman year sold on college and on his own destiny, and who is convinced that the combination of the two

plus the inspiration of his professors will send him back to his people ready to free their chains. Too often those professors turn out to be teaching abstractions that have nothing to do with the way it really is where the student came from. Too often the university is just a surrogate for society, and if it weren't for the Vietnam war and the draft, the black freshman would probably drop out. Too often he does drop out of extracurricular activities and joins a kind of collegiate ghetto of black students. Perhaps it is his sense of guilt about being there at enormous sacrifice to his family. Perhaps it is because he soon discovers that unless he gets atrocious grades and cuts most of his classes, it is impossible for him to flunk out or miss getting into graduate school.

Many white students identify with this sense of guilt. They feel partly responsible for it and are frustrated on their terms. As a dues-paying member of the radical center, I view their frustration and weep at their clumsiness, which often libels the once-proud name of social protest.

A Curriculum of Engagement

From what I have learned at Columbia, which is now on the verge of survival, and from other universities which have been spared turbulence, the answer has to lie in our ability to turn the source of the storm into an asset. The principal fault of the students is that they are involved, perhaps over-involved, and their blow-up is partly the result of the collision with our under-engagement. We can't all be super-teachers, but we can be deeply involved. The students sense in a moment our

commitment or lack of it, not just as individual professors and instructors, but as institutions. Perhaps it is because the world is in such a state of motion that the static curriculum, when it is that, makes the lecturer appear as in a frozen frame. In 1968, a year when King and Kennedy were assassinated almost on television, when Prague, Chicago, and parts of Washington seemed to be blowing up on television, when a President gave up the race because of a war that millions watch every evening while eating dinner, in a year when the electoral college debacle gave two candidates and most citizens the scare of their lives, and when we or, for that matter, the Soviets, may have three men orbiting the moon on Christmas Day; in this kind of year, in this kind of century, the status quo of abstract sterile teaching is not enough. Clark Kerr's vision of urban universities makes a lot of sense, but it will take time to pass the legislation, find the land, recruit the faculties, and begin. What is possible and, I believe, essential now is a drastic enrichment of the curriculum, not to make education easier but to make it in fact harder and much more alive. I propose bridging the artificial moat that too often separates the professional school professor from the undergraduate. It happens in some places where a giant like Polykarp Kusch of Columbia gives a course in physics for poets and a Paul Freund talks to Harvard seniors about the Constitution. But my proposal is that we integrate the entire university into an intellectual common market where the trade barriers of the past no longer exist. To separate graduate from undergraduate, one discipline from another, television in-

struction from the classroom, and men from women is to seal off vast reservoirs of wisdom and vigor from each other. It may even be an unnatural act.

Robert Oppenheimer used to say, "It is not just the scientist who is ignorant . . . we are all ignorant, but about different things." It is just possible that we can no longer afford this ignorance. Henry Friendly, the eminent federal judge, insists that teaching social studies without law is like teaching vertebrate anatomy without the backbone. Yet the absence of a link between social studies and the law school is often conspicuous. As Judge Friendly has said, "What is vital is that the law school and the faculty of arts and sciences should stop either ignoring each other or glaring at each other, and make a start on interdisciplinary programs."

One of my colleagues at Columbia, Eli Ginzberg, a nationally-renowned expert on manpower and the Negro potential, teaches in the Graduate School of Business but has no courses with undergraduates, where his kind of relevance would have special meaning for the black students. Barbara Ward is at our Business School this year, but the author of *Rich Nations, Poor Nations* has no classes with undergraduates.

Incidentally, no one at our School of Journalism teaches any courses in the undergraduate College. There happens to be a three-point course in communications, untaught this year for lack of an instructor on the undergraduate faculty. The College's new Dean, Carl Hovde, and some enterprising members of the student paper and the campus radio station are now actively trying to rectify this situation by es-

tablishing communications with the School of Journalism, just across the Sundial.

What I suggest is a cross-pollination of academic catalogues. The medical administrator and the mental health professor should teach undergraduates other than pre-med, for we will all need to know the business and ethics of medicine. Labor relations is not just for lawyers and commerce scholars. The teacher, the social worker, the police officer, all must know about the so-called right-to-work laws and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. All of us must know more about our man-made environments, good architecture, and the physical sciences, if for no other reason than that we are all consumers. We must all know about Section 315, the equal-time provision of the Communications Act, whether we are broadcasters, or politicians, or voters. And knowing about African genesis is not just for Anthropology 1 anymore than the Beatles and Arlo Guthrie are just for folk musicologists.

The Visit of Inspiration

I am convinced that the best of the abstract and the relevant can be combined in the classroom as in fact a Lippman and a Sevareid often combine them in the newsroom, particularly when the classroom becomes a seminar where the students' motivation can help set the agenda, particularly when the classroom goes out into the street or the farm or wherever the laboratory is. The purist would probably call teaching in a storefront academy, or tutoring children of migrant laborers, or doing a documentary on strip-mining in

Appalachia extracurricular. I would not. Not only does such activity fulfill a social purpose but it provides the teacher with a dynamic teaching tool. It brings out his humaneness and it provides the student with the essential ingredient—inspiration. John Hersey, Master of Pierson College at Yale, provided our school with some of its most inspiring hours last summer. We had a special program in Broadcast Journalism for twenty black students. It was a concentrated laboratory experiment to determine whether twenty inexperienced students working with almost that many instructors could become broadcast journalists, capable of what I call "content under pressure." It was highly successful and will be continued next summer, probably with newspaper work included. Mr. Hersey, author of the new book, *The Algiers Motel Incident,* hates to lecture, and the substitute format turned out to be something close to a sublime experience. The students' questions on his Detroit experience and of the ethics of writing the book about the Detroit violence were tough and searching. Hersey was responsive and frank; his experience, which had been searing, and their reaction to his insight into the arena of the black rioter and the white policeman made for one of those rare moments when the heart quickens at the sight of the learning process. Incidentally, each of those twenty students—seventeen black, one Puerto Rican, two Mexican-American—are now working in television and radio news. Their letters to me still talk of that night with Hersey. What they sensed that night and in similar seminars with Walter Cronkite, Frank McGee, Whitney

Young, McGeorge Bundy, and Bob Teague was something that Walter Lippmann wrote about almost forty-five years ago in his remarkable philosophy on public events and journalism, *Public Opinion*. Writing at another time when distrust, disillusionment and public corruption were shattering America's faith in itself, he pointed to the human quality and inspiration that could sustain us: "You cannot despair of the possibilities that could exist by virtue of any human quality which a human being has exhibited, and if amidst all the evils of this decade you have not seen men and women, known moments you would like to multiply, the Lord himself cannot help you."

To conclude, it is because I have known, amidst this awful decade, human qualities and moments I would like to multiply that I want the university and all schools, including television, to create the only antidote to the hatred and distrust that threatens our schools and our cities.

The news media, valuable as they are, cannot take the place of institutions. Again, Lippmann: "The press is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restless about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision." This alone cannot do the job, but combined with the steady light of live, relevant education, interconnected by involved teachers at every level, we just might have a chance.

"Watchman, what of the night . . ."
Teacher, what of the light?